

**EXPRESS MAIL NO. EL863782929US**

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A method for communicating between a purchaser and a plurality of sellers in an online marketplace, said method comprising the steps of:

transmitting a request for bid for a good or service to the sellers via an electronic network, the request for bid not identifying the purchaser;

receiving at least one offer for the good or service from at least one of the sellers via the electronic network, the sellers sending the offers not knowing the identity of the purchaser that is receiving the offers; and

after receiving the offers, communicating a purchase order to one of the sellers that submitted an offer in order to purchase the good or service, the purchase order identifying the purchaser.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

transmitting a statement of interest to the sellers via the electronic network, the statement of interest not identifying the purchaser; and

receiving information in response to the statement of interest from at least one of the sellers via the electronic network, the sellers sending the information not knowing the identity of the purchaser.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein in the step of transmitting the request for bid, the request for bid is transmitted to only the sellers that sent the information to the purchaser.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein in the step of transmitting the request for bid, the request for bid for the good or service is sent to all of the sellers that subscribe to a channel relating to the good or service.

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5. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid includes the sub-steps of:

receiving the request for bid at a first user node of the electronic network;

determining whether or not to send the request for bid to a server node;

forwarding the request for bid to a second user node of the electronic network through a direct connection, when it is determined not to send the request for bid to the server node; and

sending the request for bid to the server node for publication, when it is determined to send the request for bid to the server node.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid further includes the sub-step of publishing the request for bid via the server node to all of the sellers that are subscribed to one or more selected channels.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid further includes the sub-steps of:

sending the request for bid from the purchaser to the first user node; and

repeating the sub-steps of determining and forwarding until in the determining step a user node that received the request for bid decides to send the request for bid to the server node.

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8. A method for communicating between a purchaser and a seller in an online marketplace, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for bid for a good or service from the purchaser via an electronic network, the request for bid not identifying the purchaser;

transmitting an offer for the good or service to the purchaser via the electronic network, the seller sending the offer not knowing the identity of the purchaser that is receiving the offer; and

receiving a purchase order from the purchaser so as to form a contract for purchasing the good or service, the purchase order identifying the purchaser.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

receiving a statement of interest from the purchaser via the electronic network, the statement of interest not identifying the purchaser; and

transmitting information in response to the statement of interest to the purchaser via the electronic network, the seller sending the information not knowing the identity of the purchaser.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein the purchase order is the first communication in a transaction that identifies the purchaser to the seller.

11. The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of subscribing to one or more channels for receiving requests for bids, each of the channels relating to different goods or services.

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12. The method of claim 8, wherein the step of receiving the request for bid includes the sub-steps of:

receiving the request for bid at a first user node of the electronic network;

determining whether or not to send the request for bid to a server node;

forwarding the request for bid to a second user node of the electronic network through a direct connection, when it is determined not to send the request for bid to the server node; and

sending the request for bid to the server node for publication, when it is determined to send the request for bid to the server node.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the step of receiving the request for bid further includes the sub-steps repeating the sub-steps of determining and forwarding until in the determining step a user node that received the request for bid decides to send the request for bid to the server node.

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14. A method for operating an online marketplace, said method comprising the steps of:

- receiving a request for bid for a good or service from a purchaser, the request for bid not identifying the purchaser;
- transmitting the request for bid that does not identify the purchaser to a plurality of sellers via an electronic network;
- receiving at least one offer for the good or service from at least one of the sellers via the electronic network, the sellers sending the offers not knowing the identity of the purchaser that will receive the offers; and
- transmitting the offers to the purchaser.

15. The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of communicating a purchase order from the purchaser to one of the sellers that submitted an offer in order to purchase the good or service, the purchase order identifying the purchaser.

16. The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

- receiving a statement of interest from a purchaser via the electronic network, the statement of interest not identifying the purchaser;
- transmitting the statement of interest that does not identify the purchaser to the sellers via the electronic network;
- receiving information in response to the statement of interest from at least one of the sellers via the electronic network, the sellers sending the information not knowing the identity of the purchaser; and
- transmitting the information to the purchaser.

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17. The method of claim 16, wherein in the step of transmitting the request for bid, the request for bid is transmitted to only the sellers that sent the information in response to the statement of interest.

18. The method of claim 14, wherein in the step of transmitting the request for bid, the request for bid for the good or service is sent to all of the sellers that subscribe to a channel relating to the good or service.

19. The method of claim 14, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid includes the sub-steps of:

receiving the request for bid at a first user node of the electronic network;

determining whether or not to send the request for bid to a server node;

forwarding the request for bid to a second user node of the electronic network through a direct connection, when it is determined not to send the request for bid to the server node; and

sending the request for bid to the server node for publication, when it is determined to send the request for bid to the server node.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid further includes the sub-step of publishing the request for bid via the server node to all of the sellers that are subscribed to one or more selected channels.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid further includes the sub-step of repeating the sub-steps of determining and forwarding until in the determining step a user node that received the request for bid decides to send the request for bid to the server node.

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22. A machine-readable medium encoded with a program for operating an online marketplace, said program containing instructions for performing the steps of:

receiving a request for bid for a good or service from a purchaser, the request for bid not identifying the purchaser;

transmitting the request for bid that does not identify the purchaser to a plurality of sellers via an electronic network;

receiving at least one offer for the good or service from at least one of the sellers via the electronic network, the sellers sending the offers not knowing the identity of the purchaser that will receive the offers; and

transmitting the offers to the purchaser.

23. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein said program further contains instructions for performing the step of communicating a purchase order from the purchaser to one of the sellers that submitted an offer in order to purchase the good or service, the purchase order identifying the purchaser.

24. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein said program further contains instructions for performing the steps of:

receiving a statement of interest from a purchaser via the electronic network, the statement of interest not identifying the purchaser;

transmitting the statement of interest that does not identify the purchaser to the sellers via the electronic network;

receiving information in response to the statement of interest from at least one of the sellers via the electronic network, the sellers sending the information not knowing the identity of the purchaser; and

transmitting the information to the purchaser.

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25. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid includes the sub-steps of:

receiving the request for bid at a first user node of the electronic network;

determining whether or not to send the request for bid to a server node;

forwarding the request for bid to a second user node of the electronic network through a direct connection, when it is determined not to send the request for bid to the server node; and

sending the request for bid to the server node for publication, when it is determined to send the request for bid to the server node.

26. The machine-readable medium of claim 25, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid further includes the sub-step of publishing the request for bid via the server node to all of the sellers that are subscribed to one or more selected channels.

27. The machine-readable medium of claim 25, wherein the step of transmitting the request for bid further includes the sub-step of repeating the sub-steps of determining and forwarding until in the determining step a user node that received the request for bid decides to send the request for bid to the server node.